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INTRODUCTION

OF all the problems that have come in the train of the industrial revolution none are more perplexing than those that concern women. It is a wearisome commonplace that the factory has taken over much of the industrial work of the home, and that women have followed their work into the factory; but the fundamental change thus introduced into their life has not always been clearly seen. Formerly home and industry were synonymous terms for them; training for industry was training in household management. To-day industrial work is sharply separated from the management of the home, and there has come into the occupation of women a dualism that finds no parallel in the life of men. Most of the difficulties of women in industry relate themselves in some way to this fact.

An unregulated competitive system is good only for the strong. Women, by virtue of their double relation as industrial producers and as homemakers and mothers, are industrially weak. Most women are fundamentally interested in the home rather than the factory, and industrial occupation is only an interlude in their real business. Working women so-called are mostly mere girls under twenty-five who go to work with no thought of industry as a permanent career. Uninterested, untrained, unskilled, they are on a low level of efficiency, and they have little motive for climbing to a higher level. In industry a few years, then out of it into the home, they lack the discipline and solidity that come with a permanent life task. Small wonder that they crowd the unskilled labor market, and that their work commands a mere pittance.

Inefficient in their industrial work, they tend to become quite as inefficient in their function of homekeepers: for during the very years when they might otherwise be acquiring the household arts, they are busy in shop or factory, subject to a discipline requiring obedience to mechanical routine rather than that

power of thoughtful initiative which marks the skilful home-maker. Moreover, they become accustomed to the stimulus and excitement of the crowd, so that they do not want to be alone, and home life they too often find monotonous and uninteresting. The untrained, unskilled factory hand becomes the untrained, unskilled wife and mother.

Working women are not only untrained and inefficient, but industrially ignorant and lacking in standards. Hence they put up with whatever conditions the employer imposes. They do not "make a fuss," and therefore they get treatment to which no man would submit. Moreover, such a large proportion of them are mere "pin-money girls" that there is no minimum standard of wages, such as is furnished for men by the necessary cost of maintaining a family. Women's wages are perhaps in a majority of cases simply supplementary earnings, and the wages of all women, self-dependent or not, tend to be fixed on the assumption that they will live parasitically on their relatives. As a result of this lack of standards, the whole subject of the pay and conditions of women's work is a veritable chaos. Standardization has been well worked out in many men's trades, and technical progress has followed. In women's occupations it is often easier for an unprogressive employer to throw the burden of his backwardness on docile women employes by paying low wages than it is to keep up with the march of improvement in machinery and methods. So much for the human element in this problem.

On the industrial side we find, as is more than once pointed out in these papers, that industry as now organized takes no cognizance of the special needs of the worker. Competitive cheapness must be obtained at all costs. If the worker does not insist on his rights, he gets small part of the benefits of progress. Hence changes in machinery and organization bring little advantage to women workers; such changes, in fact, are frequently carried through with distinct loss to them, however great the gain to society in general. But more than this, our present industry is made for men, and it wants only standard workers, working standard hours at standard speed. The workers must conform to this inelastic system or go without a job.

Most women are physically incapable, without permanent injury to themselves and the race, of enduring for ten hours a day the strain to which modern industry subjects them; yet they are trying to conform to its mechanical routine instead of insisting that it be changed to meet their needs. So long as this change is not made, so long will women's industrial work continue a social menace.

We face, then, a double difficulty. In the first place, woman's twofold function apparently necessitates a double preparation and a divided interest and life; in the second place, our industry demands a standardized worker for the whole of his time. In consequence of this situation, women throughout the period of factory labor have been among the greatest sufferers from low wages, long hours, and unsanitary conditions. They are the very type of worker to whom the Marxian analysis in all its rigor most nearly applies, uninterested, inefficient, ignorant, untrained, standardless. With the exception of children, they constitute the most easily exploited labor force in existing society, and they are mercilessly exploited. The new social freedom of industrial life combines with low wages to tempt and drive working girls to easier means of obtaining the pleasure they normally must have, and a grave social problem thus emerges. The changed industrial situation evidently demands a new economic and social adjustment.

A glance at the state of public opinion throws some light on the general nature of the adjustment required. Women are paid less than men primarily because they will take less, not because their work is worth less or because they need less; and public opinion acquiesces without protest. If the school pays women less than men simply because it can get them for less, how much more will the factory do the same. The public does not object because it thinks of women as dependent on their male relatives and hence not requiring a living wage. This was natural enough so long as they earned their living by household management and production, leaving to men the provision of money income. But the moment women entered the industrial field the whole situation changed. Public opinion has not yet taken cognizance of this fact. Economic conditions and social organization

are out of joint. We need to readjust our ideas and our organization to the new economic facts; but in consequence of an ignorant public opinion and a sluggish social conscience the readjustment is delayed and women are suffering sadly from over-work, underpay, injurious working conditions and neglect of training for industry and the home.

We are just beginning to feel our way toward this readjustment, which involves at least four things: 1. Giving women the training necessary for their home work. 2. Making them efficient industrial producers. 3. Making them "work conscious" and giving them industrial standards. 4. Insuring them proper pay, hours and conditions, by adjusting the demands of industry to their needs and capacity. To accomplish these ends three chief means are commonly urged, industrial training, trade unionism and legislation.

Industrial, or perhaps better vocational training, is as yet scarcely past the first stages of experimentation, and we do not clearly understand its proper aims or methods. Apparently we may rightly demand of the school that it give girls a reasonable training for their work as mothers and home-keepers, at the same time that it imparts to them a degree of technical skill in industrial work, and above all, that power of adaptation to changing conditions so imperatively demanded by modern economic life. A vague statement of this kind, indeed, means little, and discussions of industrial training are at present too full of vague generalizations. What we need is a series of careful studies of particular trades in particular places, and of the possibilities of the schools in connection therewith. It is only when we get this intimate knowledge of economic conditions and build our training on it, that the training becomes of much value in the large process of social readjustment. Otherwise we may help a few girls to get better wages, but that is about all, and even that is problematical. The combination, however, of an efficient system of trade investigation, a scientifically organized and conducted employment bureau, and an intelligent educational scheme is full of promise.

Permanent organization of women workers has hitherto proved difficult, if not impossible, by reason of the youth, inexperience,

ignorance and short trade life of the young women concerned. Women's unions have come and gone, often leaving behind them certain permanent gains. In making girls industrially self-conscious, in setting standards of work and pay, in arousing public interest and awaking public conscience, thus preparing the way for legislation, they have performed valuable service even when short-lived. Sometimes a situation like that created by the New York shirtwaist strike gives opportunity to focus public attention on the condition of women workers. Great as its immediate services may be, organization at present reaches but a small fraction of women workers, and its permanent value in the larger view perhaps lies chiefly in educating working women, employers and the public to higher standards of employment and pay.

There remains the method of legislation. While law follows in the wake of public opinion in a democracy, industrial betterment often lags considerably behind the general progress of public intelligence, and the law can push the backward employer up to the level of the more enlightened one. The great advantage of the legal method is its uniformity; it puts all employers and establishments on the same basis. Moreover, its gains are usually fairly secure. A standard once embodied in law is harder to break down than a mere trade standard attained by union pressure, for example. Hence in the case of women workers, where conditions for individual improvement are unfavorable, where union methods are difficult of application, the process of readjustment will doubtless go forward largely by legal enactment. We shall see an increasing body of law governing the conditions under which women work. As the community finds that it has no other way of protecting itself against the injury it suffers from present conditions of employment of women, it will more and more resort to the prescribing of minimum legal limits below which they may not be crowded.

Fortunately for progress in this respect, our courts have generally looked with relative favor on legislation for women. The right of the state to exercise the police power to protect the health of women for the sake of future generations is now clearly established in the court of last resort. All that is necessary for

the incorporation of a new requirement into the legal standard is to convince the courts of its relation to health—a method employed with success in the Oregon and Illinois ten-hour cases. Thus far such legislation has dealt chiefly with hours, but the principle is capable of almost indefinite extension. As we approach the question of general working conditions and the more purely economic consideration of wages, the limitations of the legal method come more clearly into view; none the less the use of that method must extend beyond the present limits.

Fortunately also the method of legal enactment can be applied in some measure to bring about those modifications in the demands of industry that are necessary for women. Abandoning the fatuous attempt to keep women out of industrial life, we shall set about the task of humanizing industry by ridding it of the conditions that make wholesome life difficult for workers to attain. Realizing the greater needs of women, we may first set legal standards for them alone; and then, just as was the case in the early fight for a shorter workday, the advantage legally conceded to women may be extended to men as well. Slowly public opinion advances toward more enlightened views, and social and legal organization gradually improve with it. Following the economic upheaval that we call the economic revolution, a tremendously complex and difficult readjustment has been necessary, one made more difficult by the fact that it must be worked out in a democratic society. In the peculiarly difficult and trying situation of women during this readjustment we find abundant justification for social action to protect them against the dangers to which they are exposed, and abundant demand for the most thoroughgoing investigation on which to base such action. The present collection of papers is an attempt to state some of the manifold aspects of the problem and to discuss some of the proposed means of solution.

H. R. M.